

VZCZCXRO4780
PP RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHNP RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHTI #0823 3241414
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 191414Z NOV 08
FM AMEMBASSY TIRANA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7602
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L TIRANA 000823

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/18/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [AL](#)
SUBJECT: HUNGER STRIKE ENDS, ELECTORAL CODE PASSES

Classified By: Pol/Econ Chief Paul Poletes, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: After a nine-day hunger strike on the floor of Parliament, eleven disheveled and defiant MPs left the chamber on the evening of November 18, shortly before the remaining MPs overwhelmingly voted in favor of the new electoral code by the lopsided score of 113-1. The ringleader of the strike, Socialist Movement for Integration Chairman Ilir Meta, called the new electoral law a "consensual crime," and lambasted Prime Minister Berisha as well as opposition leader Edi Rama for "colluding" to pass an "antidemocratic" law. The failure of the hunger strike is a serious defeat for Meta, who launched the strike in hopes of either derailing the electoral law or creating a larger crisis that would require international intervention or mediation. END SUMMARY.

Hunger Strike Ends Unexpectedly

¶2. (SBU) The hunger strike ended at approximately 7 pm on the evening of November 18 as the Parliament opened the debate on the new electoral code. When it became clear to the strikers that overwhelming passage of the code was imminent, several of the strikers gave defiant speeches then walked out of the chamber. Shortly after the departure of the strikers, the remaining MPs passed the new electoral law by a vote of 113-1, with 4 abstentions. Before leaving the chamber, Meta lambasted the new law as an anti-democratic basis for the upcoming elections, and said that PM Berisha and Socialist Party leader Edi Rama had colluded to draft a "consensual crime." Meta also lashed out at the diplomatic community, saying that diplomats "could not cover up the crime of the electoral code."

¶3. (C) Another key factor in Meta's decision to end the strike was his and the other strikers' realization on the afternoon of November 18 that their (but mainly Meta's) concerted efforts to drag the Embassy, OSCE and EU Missions into the drama had failed. Since the day the hunger strike began, Meta supporters had pestered the Embassy, OSCE and EU Missions, both lobbying for support and looking for any sign that the diplomatic community would intervene on behalf of the hunger strikers and their cause.

¶4. (C) Comment: Meta emerges from the hunger strike even weaker than before in his ongoing battle with Edi Rama for the hearts and minds of left wing voters. Although Meta's confrontational, attention-grabbing tactics have fired up his small base (appx. 10 percent of voters) it is unclear what, if any, traction he will gain with the wider electorate on the left. Meta's only hope between now and the election will be to pitch himself as the "real opposition" to PM Berisha, (in contrast to the more conciliatory approach favored by Edi Rama), and hope that voters fed up with the ruling Democratic Party and PM Berisha will listen and vote accordingly. At this point, however, that seems unlikely.

WITHERS